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ABSTRACT

The Synergistic Model of Organizational Career Development is an attempt to combine best practice principles from two domains: organizational development and individual career planning. The model assumes three levels of intervention within an organization: philosophical, strategic, and practical. Interventions at any of the levels may be directed toward the employees, the organization, or the balancing and interactive process that bring the two systems together. At the philosophical level, employees are concerned with becoming or managing to stay meaningfully connected to the world of work, organizations are concerned with defining their central purpose as an organization, and balancing/interactive processes are designed to balance employees' and the organization's long-term needs and goals. At the strategic level, employees are concerned with enhancing their careers, organizations are concerned with best meeting their organizational outcomes, and balancing/interactive processes are designed to balance short-term employees and organization goals. At the practical level, employees are concerned with staying employable, organizations are concerned ensuring that employees perform tasks essential to the organization, and balancing/interactive processes are designed to balance organizational demands with employee performance. The ultimate goal of balancing/interactive interventions must be to bring individual career planning into alignment with effective organizational development strategies. (Contains 23 references) (MN)

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Career Paths and Organizational Development: Expanding Alliances

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Abstract

Paper presented at the 25th Annual Consultation on Career Development (NATCON) in Ottawa, Canada. This paper describes the framework for implementing a new model of organizational career development. The new model is entitled the Synergistic Model of Organizational Career Development.

Career Paths and Organizational Development: Expanding Alliances

The field of organizational career development has experienced dramatic change over the past decade. Systemic changes have affected how organizations need to be managed, and how individuals need to plan for and manage their career paths. These changes have created a need for the disciplines of organizational development planning and individual career planning to be brought into much closer alignment than ever before. Bernes (1999) described the Synergistic Model of Organizational Career Development, which is one of the first attempts to harness the power of best of practice principles from organizational development with the best of practice principles from individual career planning. In this article, we discuss the core issues, strategies, and tasks associated with the successful implementation of the model. In addition, a list of potential strategies for balancing employee and organizational needs at each level of the model is offered.

A Framework for Applying the Synergistic Model

Dimensions of the Synergistic Model

The implementation of effective organizational career development interventions may be conceptualized along three dimensions: the level of the intervention, the target of the intervention, and the description of the intervention (see Figure 1). There are three levels of intervention within an organization: the philosophical level, the strategic level, and the practical level. Interventions at any of these levels may be directed towards the employees, the organization, or to the balancing and interactive processes that bring the two systems together. Finally, interventions may be thought of in terms of the central issues that need to be addressed, the general strategies that are most likely to produce positive resolution of those issues, and the specific tasks that may be employed to implement the strategies.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The central issues of organizational career development are summarized below in the form of nine critical questions (see Table 1). Framing these central issues as questions encourages the exploration of possible strategies to address each issue. These strategies require that certain tasks be identified, and each task in turn becomes a focal point for a practical intervention. Examples of the issues, strategies, and tasks for the balancing and interactive processes are now described in greater detail.

Insert Table 1 about here

Philosophical level. At the philosophical level, the core issue faced by employees is "How do I get/stay meaningfully connected to the world of work?" Organizations must face the issue "What is our central purpose as an organization?" Thus, the balancing issue becomes "How do we balance the long-term needs of employees and the organization?"

The core strategy for helping employees to deal with the issue of how they can become and stay meaningfully connected to the world of work is to continuously seek a meaningful connection between their own vision and the outcomes the organization is attempting to produce. Organizations, on the other hand, need to develop a broad-based conceptual framework that identifies and describes the organization's central purpose. While these strategies are rarely conducted in conjunction with each other, each is made far more potent through the process of reciprocal confirmation. Through this process, employee ideas are heard and the organizational vision and outcomes are communicated. Thorough two-way communication provides the mechanism through which the appropriate visions can be shared and acted upon. At this level, employee visions may have an impact upon organizational visions and vice versa.

There are two broad tasks associated with the balancing/interactive process of reciprocal confirmation. For each task, examples of specific interventions are provided. Please note that the examples are intended to be illustrative, not exhaustive.

Reciprocal Confirmation Task #1: Provide employees with the opportunity to share their visions and to have input into the organization's vision/outcomes. This conveys the message that employee opinions and ideas matter. These ideas may result in some useful outcomes for employees and for the organization. Some forums for this include:

- providing employee suggestion boxes—a safe and potentially anonymous location for employee feedback (Plas, 1996);
- rewarding employees for submitting useful ideas, thereby further encouraging employee communication and providing more input to the organization (Plas, 1996);
- groupware discussions wherein employees share their visions and ideas for a shared vision via computer programs that may or may not maintain participant anonymity (Quinn et al., 1996);
- value-added exercises which involve employees in brainstorming sessions designed to generate new outcomes for the organization (Magnusson, 1996); and
- gap analysis exercises which encourage employees to participate in sessions designed to identify new ways of meeting existing organizational outcomes (Magnusson, 1996).

Reciprocal Confirmation Task #2: Share organizational vision/outcomes. Sharing the organization's vision and outcomes with employees provides a critical ingredient for the balancing/interactive process of reciprocal confirmation. Sharing this kind of information with employees greatly facilitates the likelihood of effective alignments between employee and organizational visions. This can be done through presentations, videos, individual meetings with supervisors/managers, e-mail, newsletters (Plas, 1996), and/or intranets (Finney, 1997).

Strategic level. At the strategic level, the core issue facing employees is "How can I enhance my career?" Organizations face the issue "How can we best meet our organizational outcomes?"

These issues result in the obvious balancing issue of "How do we balance the short-term needs or goals of employees and the organization?"

The core strategy for helping employees to deal with the issue of how they can enhance their careers is to develop a personal career management plan. To create a personal career management plan, employees need to develop a short- term career path/goal that may include a plan for a new and/or enhanced contribution to organizational outcomes. The assumption at this level is that employability within the organization is achieved by demonstrating that one can make an impact upon organizational outcomes. Organizations deal with the issue of how to meet their outcomes by developing strategies or processes for outcome attainment.

The challenge of the balancing/interactive processes at the strategic level is to optimize employee potential for contribution to the selected organizational strategies/processes. This is done through the core strategy of critical discourse. In other words, the organization and the employee first need to critically evaluate each other's respective strategies, and then explore how the personal career management plans of the individual may best be aligned with the strategies chosen by the organization. Attaining alignment may mean modifications to the employee plan, to the organizational strategy, or both. The assumption here is that synergies are created when the short-term needs and goals of the employee and the organization are congruent. When this happens, both the employee and the organization benefit.

There are five specific tasks that will facilitate the balancing/interactive process of critical discourse. Sample strategies that can be used to accomplish each task are provided after each.

Critical Discourse Task #1: Establish communication networks. Managers are encouraged to initiate frequent career discussions with their employees to provide support and guidance as well as to further expand on the notion of searching for ways of balancing individual/organizational needs and goals (Kaye, 1993; Tyler, 1997). Formal and/or informal arrangements can also be made to link employees up with coaches/mentors who can support, teach, facilitate, and guide them in

their career decision making (Butler, Ferris, & Napier, 1991; Tyler, 1997). Employees can also be taught how to network and gain the referrals they may need in order to achieve their goals (Kaye, 1993; Niven, 1997). These programs can involve formally established organizational networks, or strategies can be informally discussed within the context of career discussions.

Critical Discourse Task #2: Create a data base of employee competencies. Teaching employees to identify competencies through self-assessment (e.g., workbooks, workshops, or computer programs) may permit them to better align themselves with the strategies the organization is implementing in order to reach its outcomes (Tyler, 1997). Helping employees to synthesize self-assessment information with self-evaluations of performance would also allow them to establish career goals and action plans. Managers or supervisors can dramatically increase the likelihood of employees reaching their goals by helping them to set realistic timelines.

Critical Discourse Task #3: Align employees with required processes. Breaking down organizational outcomes into requirements for human resources facilitates the specification of employee needs for selection, deployment, and training (Butler et al., 1991; Martinez, 1997). Work teams can be assembled to enable employees to utilize their competencies to enhance their contribution to the organization (Lawler, 1991; Plas, 1996). Specific goals for each work team can further promote the attainment of organizational outcomes. Job postings may also help with the task of aligning employees with required processes by providing information about positions that need to be filled and by openly displaying the criteria for selection (Belcourt et al., 1996).

Critical Discourse Task #4: Continue to evaluate and refine alignments to ensure employee and organizational satisfaction. Organizations can utilize a combination of job redesign (Belcourt et al., 1996; Lawler, 1991), job enrichment (Lawler, 1991), and job rotation (Belcourt et al., 1996) in order to achieve better alignment between personal career management plans and organizational strategic plans. Adding, varying, or rotating responsibilities among employees also makes their jobs more challenging and interesting. Providing support for employee movement up, down, across, or

out of the organization (Kaye, 1982) may also be necessary in order to facilitate an optimal match between personal career management plans and organizational strategic plans. In order to meet their needs and goals, employees may need to learn how to market their services and their ideas more effectively (Niven, 1997); workshops may be designed for such purposes (Lewis, 1996).

Critical Discourse Task #5: Develop an ongoing organizational career development program. There are several factors to consider when developing a comprehensive organizational career development program. First, programs should be developed jointly with representatives from each of the stakeholders. Second, designing multiple interrelated interventions allows for collectively meeting the needs of both the employees and the organization (Leibowitz, Farren, & Kaye, 1986). Third, conducting a pilot project prior to full-scale implementation is an effective method of testing the career development program. By starting out small, feedback from participants can circumvent the possibility of repeating mistakes on a large scale. Fourth, evaluation and redesign of the program can then take place, based on the results of the pilot project. Finally, after the organizational career development program has been redesigned, the program can be publicized throughout the organization. When the program has been generalized to the rest of the organization, the organizational career development program can be considered complete (Leibowitz et al., 1986).

Practical level. At the practical level, employees face the issue "How do I stay employable?" The core strategy for helping employees to deal with the issue of remaining employable is to acquire and demonstrate specific competencies. On the organizational level, organizations need to ensure that employees are competently performing tasks that are essential to the organization. Thus, the core issue for achieving balance at the practical level is to develop systems of monitoring and management that ensure that organizational competencies are accurately set and that employees are capable of and committed to demonstrating these competencies.

Four specific tasks facilitate the balancing/interactive process of monitoring/management. Sample strategies that can be used to accomplish each task are provided.

Monitoring and Management Task #1: Involve employees in establishing performance expectations. Establishing performance is a reciprocal process. The organization can involve employees in establishing performance expectations by engaging in job/task analysis in order to determine the specific competencies required for the role/task they are attempting to fill (Butler et al., 1991; Dolan & Schuler, 1994; Stone & Meltz, 1993). Clearly understanding these requirements facilitates the process of employee selection, training, and evaluation. It also provides employees with specific information about the role to help them decide if that is what they want. Analyzing high performers and using the information to enhance the training and development agenda is also an effective strategy that builds on the concept of job/task analysis. Competencies used by high performers are identified, and used to establish training and development programs for other employees (Butler et al., 1991).

Monitoring and Management Task #2: Communicate and reach agreement on compensation and reward systems. The development of compensation and reward systems based on performance is a good monitoring/management strategy for the practical level. Such systems require clear employee performance expectations which, in turn, force organizations to clearly identify the organizational competencies required. Employees are then rewarded for providing what the organization has deemed necessary (Belcourt et al., 1996; Bencivenga, 1997; Edwards & Ewen, 1996a, 1996b; Hendry & Maggio, 1996; Martinez, 1997; Tyler, 1997).

Monitoring & Management Task #3: Provide employees with necessary training and development options. Organizations need to provide training and development options that are necessary for the strategic development of staff, in accordance with the outcomes the organization is trying to achieve. In addition, the organization must clearly identify the competencies it requires, identify how employees measure up against the required competencies, and remediate deficiencies

through selected training and development programs (Butler et al., 1991; Hendry & Maggio, 1996; McLagan, 1996; Souque, 1996). Providing access to these programs also demonstrates that the organization values career development and makes it easier for employees to reach their goals (Bencivenga, 1997; Butler et al., 1991). Information from employee self-assessments (conducted at the strategic level) can be stored in data banks and used to set future training and development priorities (Butler et al., 1991; Tyler, 1997).

Monitoring and Management Task #4: Provide a forum for the review of employee performance. Performance appraisals help employees and organizations to evaluate whether performance expectations have been met (Belcourt et al., 1996; Bencivenga, 1997; Martinez, 1997; Stone & Meltz, 1993; Tyler, 1997). Discrepancies can be identified to help set training and development goals. For example, Edwards and Ewan's (1996a, 1996b) 360 Degree Feedback Model has been successfully incorporated in a number of settings. A less formal strategy is to conduct periodic, and more frequent employee/manager reviews of performance and assessment of progress toward goals. These reviews provide employees with the message that the organization values ongoing dialogue, support, and performance discussions all the time—not just at the annual or biannual performance appraisal meeting. Discussions could also take place between the employee and the manager regarding the alignment of employee competencies with the required organizational competencies (Hendry & Maggio, 1996; Martinez, 1997; Tyler, 1997). These discussions reinforce the concept of balancing employee needs and goals with those of the organization.

Summary

The radical restructuring of the workplace, and of worker expectations, has created a demand for a renewed model of organizational career development. In this article, we have argued the case for the implementation of the Synergistic Model of Organizational Career Development. In particular, attention needs to be paid to the balancing and interactive processes that bring

individual career planning into alignment with effective organizational development strategies. The synergies that may accrue will serve to not only bridge the gap between individual and organizational planning, but to expand the alliances between worker and employer in an increasingly competitive environment.

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Figure 1.

A Three-Dimensional Model of Organizational Career Development

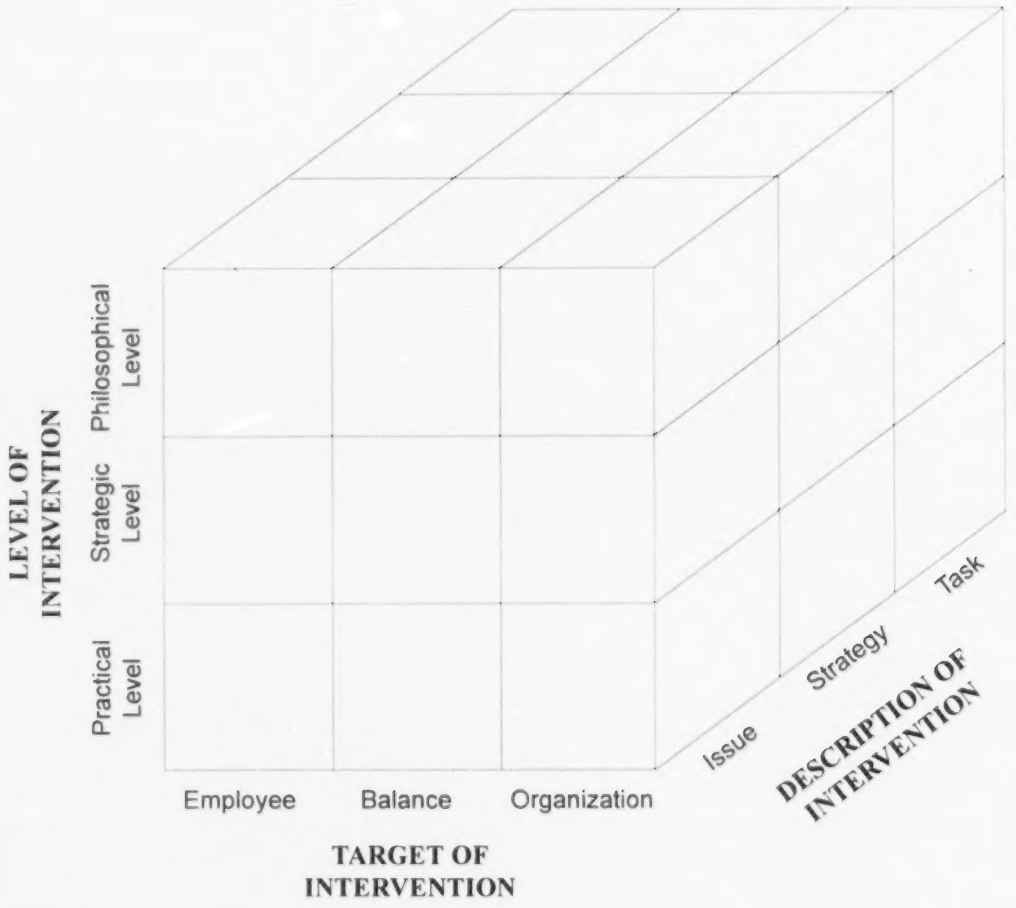

Table 1.

Central Issues of Organizational Career Development

	Employee Level	Balancing/ Interactive Processes	Organizational Level
Philosophical Level	1A How do I become/ stay meaningfully connected to the world of work?	1B How do we balance the long-term needs/ goals of employees and the organization?	1C What is our central purpose as an organization?
Strategic Level	2A How can I enhance my career?	2B How do we balance the short-term needs/goals of employees and the organization?	2C How can we best meet our organizational outcomes?
Practical Level	3A How do I stay employable?	3B How do we balance organizational demands with employee performance?	3C How do we ensure employees perform tasks that are essential to the organization?

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